

System Configuration Team (SCT)

**Meeting Notes
February 21, 2002**

Greetings and Introductions.

The February 21 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS and facilitated by Richard Forester. The agenda and a list of attendees for the meeting are attached as Enclosures A and B. Hevlin read a round of introductions, a review of the agenda and the notes from the December 21 SCT meeting.

The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced may be too lengthy to routinely include with the meeting notes; copies of all enclosures referred to in the minutes are available upon request from Kathy Ceballos of NMFS at 503/230-5420.

2. Review of FY'03 CRFM Program Spreadsheet.

John Kranda distributed an updated version of the FY'02 CRFM measures worksheet (Enclosure C); he noted that most of the changes in this version came from Walla Walla District. The overall effect of these changes is a \$3 million drop in the cost of the FY'02 program, to just under \$78 million, Kranda said. We currently have only \$68 million available in the FY'02 CRFM budget, due to savings and slippage from the original \$81 million FY'02 appropriation, Kranda said.

We're getting to the point where we have some fairly substantive contracts to award, Kranda continued, such as the corner collector contract in July; we'll need about \$3 million to be available at that time. Basically, he said, the Portland and Walla Walla Districts need to sit down and figure out how much is needed and when. In response to a question from Ron Boyce, Mike Mason said the districts are exploring the possibility of getting savings and slippage restored, or re-programming enough funds from other Corps departments to cover the current \$10 million shortfall; there is no guarantee that those funds will be made available, Mason said, but we have been pretty successful in finding those funds in past years.

Mason spent a few minutes going through some of the items that have changed on the new version of the spreadsheet, beginning with the Ice Harbor auxiliary water supply line-item on page 1 of the spreadsheet. At the conclusion of this exercise, Kranda said he will continue to update the SCT on this issue at future meetings of the group.

3. Update on FY'03 CRFM Project Funding.

Kranda said there is \$98 million in the President's budget for the FY'03 CRFM program; we don't know what Congress will do with that number, he said, but that's the amount the President has asked for. That would be enough to fund almost all of our high-priority items, he said; it would get us through line-item 44, and the high-priority items end at line-item 46. Kranda added that line-item 46, the Lower Columbia estuary studies, contribute to the only new start in the entire Corps budget nationwide.

With respect to Chief Joseph flow deflectors project, said Kranda, there is still no new start there, but there is some interest, on the part of the Northwest Congressional delegation, to find the funds for that project. Kranda said he will provide further information as it becomes available. Hevlin noted that, while federal employees are prohibited from expressing their support for specific line-items to the Congressional delegation, others, such as the states and tribes, are not so constrained. Kranda added that Congress has the authority to add funding for the Chief Joseph flow deflectors if it so chooses.

Rod Woodin noted that there is a major disconnect here, because the decision was made not to undertake the hugely-expensive gas abatement improvements at Grand Coulee Dam on the understanding that the Chief Joseph flow deflectors project would go forward. Bruce Suzumoto said the Power Planning Council may be able to help generate support for the Chief Joseph flow deflectors project.

4. FY'03 CRFM Program Prioritization and Report on Assignments from the December SCT Meeting.

A. List of Contract Awards Scheduled in FY'02. Kranda distributed Enclosure D, a list of the construction contracts that have been or will be awarded prior to FY'03, but which will continue to have financial impacts in FY'03 – continuing high-priority projects, in other words, with the exception of the Lower Granite auxiliary water supply project, which was rated a medium priority. Obviously the Bonneville 2 surface bypass (corner collector) contract, to be awarded this July, is the big Kahuna at \$32 million, said Kranda.

The total for these contracts is about \$46 million, Kranda said; if we award all of these contracts in FY'02, then do not wind up getting \$98 million in FY'03 CRFM funding, that could have a serious impact on our ability to fund all of our high-priority projects in FY'03.

The group discussed the potential impacts of this issue; Boyce and Woodin expressed frustration with the fact that there are many worthy and important medium-priority line-items for

which there is apparently no hope or expectation of funding. Kranda noted that, while there is no way to know what Congress will do with the President's \$98 million request for the FY'03 CRFM program, \$98 million is a significant increase over the approximately \$80 million that has been the average CRFM appropriation in recent years. We have no choice but to let the people in Washington know what we need, then take what we get, he said – that's just financial reality. All we can do is try to phase in as many of those medium-priority projects as possible each year, Kranda said.

Virtually all of those medium-priority items are specifically called for in the BiOp, Woodin said – where's the Corps' commitment to implementing the BiOp? Kranda reiterated that \$98 million is a \$20 million increase over recent CRFM appropriation amounts; I'd call that a pretty strong commitment to the BiOp, he said. Also, said Kranda, we don't have to fund every item called for in the BiOp in the first few years of implementation – we'll try to get the highest-priority work done first, but some of the lower-priority actions may not be funded until Year 9 or 10 of the implementation process.

The group discussed potential ways to address this issue; Forester noted that there are about \$25 million in medium-priority items on the spreadsheet, and proposed that the group could spend a few minutes working their way through the high- and medium-priority items to see whether some re-prioritization is warranted.

The reality is that we have a certain amount to spend each year, Hevlin said; there is never enough money to do everything we would like to do, and it therefore becomes our job to make the most efficient use of the funds we're provided. At Boyce's request, Kranda explained how the Corps' multi-layered budgeting process works.

Ken Barnhardt noted that the action agencies may have a slightly different view of BiOp implementation than NMFS or the states do. Our view is that, as long as you're meeting the performance standards in the BiOp, it may not be necessary to implement every RPA the BiOp contains, Barnhardt said; rather, our goal is to deliver the biggest bang for the buck for both juveniles and adults. That philosophy is reflected in the project prioritization criteria the SCT used last year, Hevlin said.

There are two contracts that have to be let in March, Hevlin said – Lower Monumental deflectors and The Dalles adult channel dewatering. Are there any SCT objections to the Corps proceeding to award those contracts? Hevlin asked. After a brief discussion, no SCT dissents were registered to the idea that the Corps should proceed and award these contracts.

B. Spreadsheet Line-Items Broken Out into Categories. Kranda distributed Enclosure E, a new version of the FY'02 CRFM measures worksheet, with the line-items broken out by category – adult facilities, adult research, facilities reliability, juvenile facilities, juvenile research and other actions. This breakout was requested at the last SCT meeting, he explained; it is simply intended as a tool to assist the SCT in its decision-making process. Hevlin said that, in his opinion, this is a valuable tool; another thing that would be useful is a dam-by-dam

breakdown of what actions and projects are planned and when, for, say, the FY'03-'08 period, initially. We could then update the spreadsheet annually, he said, adding that Lower Monumental and The Dalles are the first two projects that should be done. Woodin agreed that such a tool would be extremely useful. Kranda and Mason said they will attempt to produce such a "critical path diagram," at least for some projects, in time to inform the discussion at the March SCT meeting.

C. BiOp Passage Strategies and Prioritization Criteria Used in FY'02. In response to a request made at the last SCT meeting, Hevlin distributed Enclosure F, copies of the criteria used by the SCT in its prioritization of the FY'02 CRFM measures. He noted that a lot of work had gone into the development of these criteria, and said that, in his opinion, they are still valid. Hevlin also distributed Enclosure G, copies of the BiOp language pertaining to juvenile fish passage strategies or priorities. Steve Rainey spent a few minutes going over these passage priorities, noting that spill is the first priority, surface collection is the second, surface bypass is the third priority, intake screens and bypass systems the fourth and improvements to the turbine environment the fifth.

D. Process for Priority Listing. Forester said that, as been extensively discussed at today's meeting, the high-priority measures (items 1-46) on the FY'03 CRFM spreadsheet will consume the entire \$98 million CRFM appropriation, if that is in fact the amount Congress ultimately appropriates. One way to approach this dilemma is to say that only high-priority items will go forward in FY'03, he said; we could also invite the SCT to nominate medium-priority measures (items 47-75) or new items they feel should be funded in FY'03. I would propose that we keep a running tally of such medium-priority projects, he said, and discuss them at future SCT meetings. No objections were raised to Forester's suggested approach to resolving this item.

Boyce said he will work with the other salmon managers to develop a consensus re-prioritization recommendation. Rock Peters said the Corps would like to add one line-item for FY'02, high-Q PIT detection, which has received a high priority from SRWG. He added that the cost of this item is \$300,000 for FY'02. Woodin said he is reluctant to support funding for the high-Q PIT line-item without knowing its out-year funding implications. Peters replied that this would be a pilot study only to assess the feasibility and utility of this technology. Ultimately, it was agreed to defer an SCT recommendation on funding for this item until the next meeting of this group; Peters said he will distribute copies of the project proposal to the other SCT participants, to help inform their discussion. In response to a question from Hevlin, Peters said he is willing to wait until the next SCT meeting for a decision on this issue.

5. Other Updates.

A. Bonneville Decision Document. Doug Clark said Hevlin had asked him to update the group on the status of the Bonneville decision document; he distributed Enclosure H, the Corps' letter of response to the ISRP's preliminary review of the draft Bonneville decision document. Clark spent a few minutes going through this letter; please refer to Enclosure H for details of

these comments. The bottom line is that we have agreed to restructure the decision document somewhat, said Clark, as well as adding some additional language and information, in response to the ISRP's comments. Clark said there will be some discussion of this issue at next week's Portland District FFDRWG meeting; the ISRP's final comments are expected to be available soon. The goal is to finalize the Bonneville Decision Document by some time in April, Clark said.

B. Synopsis of Walla Walla District FFDRWG Meeting Feb. 12-13. Marvin Shutters briefed the SCT on the main items discussed at the most recent Walla Walla District FFDRWG meeting. Boyce asked what FFDRWG's decision had been on the McNary transport study modifications; Shutters replied that those modifications are underway, and should be made in plenty of time to allow the study to proceed this spring. In response to another question, Shutters said the tagging of fish at upstream hatcheries was a point of disagreement that has since been resolved. Other issues were raised regarding the basic goals and direction of the transport study at that meeting, Shutters said; after extensive discussion, it was agreed that, because PIT-tagging is already underway, the transport study will proceed in 2002.

Other items discussed at the February 12-13 FFDRWG meeting included the following, said Shutters:

- McNary spillway deflector optimization
- Ice Harbor deflector
- Lower Monumental deflector optimization/stilling basin repair
- Little Goose deflector optimization
- Lower Granite deflector optimization'
- McNary turbine survival program studies
- McNary forebay and JBS temperature
- Cylindrical dewatering
- Fish ladder temperature evaluation
- Kelt study
- Adult salmon PIT
- Little Goose JFF PIT diversion modifications
- McNary non-intrusive PIT detections
- Removable spillway weir
- Tailrace egress
- McNary modernization

C. Implementation Planning. Ken Barnhardt briefed the SCT on the status of the implementation planning process. He noted that the BiOp calls for three basic plans: the five-year implementation plan, the annual implementation plan, focused on what is to be accomplished in the next 12 months, and third, the annual progress report, which looks back on the year just completed. We're working on the progress report now, Barnhardt said; as everyone

here knows, 2001 was somewhat of an unusual year. The progress report should be out by the first week in March.

We now need to update the five-year plan, to review our strategies and priorities for the next five years in light of what was accomplished in 2001, Barnhardt said. We also need to begin work on the FY'03 annual implementation plan, he said.

Once the progress report is submitted to NMFS, NMFS has 45 days to produce its findings letter, Barnhardt continued. The focus of that findings letter will be the items needed to comply with the upcoming three-year check-in point, he said.

In response to a question from Bruce Suzumoto, Barnhardt said the BiOp and the implementation planning process do contain provision for adaptive management, so that the plans can be changed to take into account new information without re-initiating consultation. Suzumoto noted that the Council is about to enter its rulemaking process, and said it is hoped that any recommendations that come out of that process can be taken into account in the BiOp implementation process.

6. Next SCT Meeting Date.

The date of the next SCT meeting was changed to Thursday, March 21. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.